Sex and the Unspoken in Male Street Prostitution

by

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Abstract: Although the overwhelming majority of male prostitutes work through agencies or by placing their own ads, most studies of male prostitution focus upon young men who work on the street. Remarkably, these studies seldom identify the dynamics of poverty and street-level violence as important elements of their examination. Investigations of male sex work — few though they are — focus almost exclusively upon the sexual aspects of "the life." Despite the importance of these networks in shaping the contours of street life, and often in enabling one's very survival, the primary research focus has remained on questions of sexual identity, sexual practice with clients, and sexual abuse as a causative factor. Meanwhile, studies which do examine the dynamics of male street life typically do not examine questions of prostitution or other issues related to sexuality. A dominant theme within this literature consists of specifying the social mores of the most aggressive and socially problematic participants within street society, particularly gang members and drug dealers. The dissimilar nature of these images relates directly to the political projects of the dominant culture, which, in a very general way, seeks to "rescue" (reintegrate) deviant white youth, while controlling and excluding deviant youth of color. The political aim of reintegrating runaways into middle-class trajectories has the effect of authorizing certain discourses regarding their behavior on the streets, while marginalizing or completely disallowing others. This paper seeks to examine and challenge these trends of representation.

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Although the overwhelming majority (around 80%) of male prostitutes work through agencies or by placing their own ads (Allman, 1999; Leigh, 1994), most studies of male prostitution focus upon young men who work on the street. Remarkably, these studies seldom identify the dynamics of poverty and street-level violence as important elements of their examination. Investigations of male sex work — few though they are — tend to follow studies of female prostitutes in focusing almost exclusively upon the sexual aspects of "the life." While these studies might make reference to the notion that poverty forces individuals into prostitution, they generally do not discuss the other results of this poverty, the manner in which it shapes both social networks on the street and conflict within those networks. Despite the importance of these networks in shaping the contours of street life, and often in enabling one's very survival, the primary research focus has remained on questions of sexual identity, sexual practice with clients, and sexual abuse as a causative factor.

Meanwhile, studies which do examine the dynamics of male street life typically do not examine questions of prostitution or other issues related to sexuality. A dominant theme within this literature consists of specifying the social mores of the most aggressive and socially problematic participants within street society, particularly gang members and drug dealers. Many of the contemporary classics of urban ethnography such as Anderson's (1990) StreetWise and (1999) Code of the Street, Bourgois' (1996) In Search of Respect, Jankowski's (1991) Islands in the Street, Venkatesh's (2000) American

Project, Wacquant's (2003) Body and Soul, and Williams' (1992) Crackhouse: Notes from the End of the Line all direct attention toward the most aggressively masculine men on the street. Ethnographies within this genre typically fail to document situations in which the masculine identity of young urban men is compromised, or situations in which these men act against locally hegemonic versions of masculinity. To the limited extent that sexuality is considered within these narratives, the imagery is heterosexual and tends to reinforce an iconography of male domination, as in Anderson's (1990) analysis of black male interest in "sexual conquest," Williams' (1992) narration of male-controlled sex-for-crack exchanges, or Bourgois' (1996) description of gang rape among urban adolescents. The focus upon the most macho and terrifyingly brutal aspects of street life is perhaps understandable given the socially problematic nature of the behaviors described, as well as the power these men exercise within the street environment. However, in the absence of a more fully developed literature documenting less violent aspects of urban males' lives, these masculinized ethnographies run the risk of reinforcing an image of underclass men as dangerous, hypermasculine reprobates.

Not surprisingly, then, there is little crossover between the literatures which explore male prostitution and those that examine the dynamics of men's life on the street. The texts do not cite one another, and even more interestingly, their various protagonists — the sexualized male prostitute victim and the hypermasculine drug-dealing gang member — do not appear together. An artificial divide exists between these two sets of writings, despite the simple facts that (a) men prostituting on the street encounter and participate in a masculine economy of violence and threat which shapes their daily interactions on the street; (b) many men prostituting on the street form loose cliques

which might engage in a variety of illegal acts; and (c) at least a few male gang members also prostitute (the practice was even relatively commonplace throughout the 1950s and 60s; see Allen, 1980; Kaye, 2003; Reiss, 1987 [1961]). Mass media representations of young men on the street similarly present two divergent foci, one upon the sexualized victim status of the (white) prostitute, and another upon the non-sexualized predator status of the (non-white) gang member, drug dealer, etc. The dissimilar nature of these images relates directly to the political projects of the dominant culture, which, in a very general way, seeks to "rescue" (reintegrate) deviant white youth, while controlling and excluding deviant youth of color. Given the rapid ascendancy of prisons in contemporary society, it is not surprising to find that reports on "youth" in general tend to emphasize the violence of youth of color, even though actual youth crime rates are declining (Males, 1996; 1999). At the same time, the desire to rehabilitate "lost" white youth can be seen both in the state focus on providing services for (implicitly white and middle-class) runaway youth, and more generally in the sympathetic portrayal and victim status usually accorded to runaway teens.

The political aim of reintegrating runaways into middle-class trajectories has the effect of authorizing certain discourses regarding their behavior on the streets, while marginalizing or completely disallowing others. The following quote, for example, sp oken by a former male prostitute and quoted in a book catering to social service professions, exemplifies many of the discursive features utilized within this perspective:

> Yeah, I was out on Santa Monica and Orange nightly. I made a lot of money having sex with men. I spent it all too! I couldn't make it on

> minimum wage and trying to apply for a job when you don't have clean clothes, a phone number, and an address is really difficult. I used the one thing that I had — my body. The funny thing is that most times I just used the money to buy drugs to chill myself out from the pain I felt from having to live my life like that. I never planned for this to happen. I was a real mess during that time of my life (Mallon: 1999: 134)

This narrative posits prostitution as an unplanned and economically-coerced option for street youths. The effects of the work are portrayed exclusively in terms of emotional suffering which then leads to illicit drug use, a practice that is seen to quickly overwhelm any possible economic benefit. Notably, the elements of this story are not deployed in such a manner as to make the young man appear as a socially reprehensible deviant, but rather as a victim in need of help (most likely from one of the social service workers to which the text is directed).

The point in identifying these divergent trends within the representation of race and gender on the street is not to suggest that the lives of male street prostitutes exactly resemble those of male gang members, that "boy prostitutes" are really "angry young men." Given the punitive treatment young men of color receive as actual or potential "gang-bangers," this could hardly be considered a useful goal. Nor is the point to suggest that male street prostitutes should not be considered sexually exploited victims, as they are most commonly portrayed within both the popular and social scientific literature. Rather, my aim is to highlight the larger political projects which inform not only portrayals created by service agencies and researchers, but also those created by male

street-based sex workers themselves. Thus, my intent in beginning this essay with a story that emphasizes the non-sexual aspects of street life is to highlight not only some of what has been left out of prior academic accounts, but also to suggest something of the masculinized peer environment within which male street workers frequently must represent themselves. Ultimately, my aim is threefold: to illuminate the tropes which have been utilized in the portrayal of male prostitution; to point toward the material and political interests which have shaped those depictions; and to bring forth imagery which has been left out by the dominant tropes.

Directing attention to questions of power and ideology draws out the interesting fact that the hegemonic representations of male street prostitutes are not made by the street workers themselves, but by individuals who work at various service agencies, as well as by journalists and researchers who perform their work through these organizations. The representations created through this process have consequences not only for street workers, but for those who make the images as well. In shaping a particular vision of male street prostitution, service providers implicitly define their own status and role within the environment. Seen in this light, the narratives which surround male street prostitutes are often only peripherally related to their experiences and c oncerns; these narratives instead act as a useful means through which the authors make claims and counter-claims about a variety of topics.

The narratives which surround male street prostitution deploy a variety of discourses in contradictory ways in order to achieve their particular effects, not just of sexuality, but of gender, of race, of age, and of drug use. One of the central questions around which the narratives cluster concerns the issue of “agency.” As Jane Flax (1995)

points out, the social meaning of agency derives from the importance of "freedom" and other similar concepts in Western thought; in establishing that a given population does or does not exercise agency, one makes implicit judgments regarding the status of the activities that define that group. Given the status of free choice within ethical (i.e., social) debate, it is not surprising to find heated controversy concerning the agency, or lack thereof, of participants engaged in various disputed practices. The result of this situation makes the subjectivity of male prostitutes a contested ground of representation, with various sides attempting to "prove" that street hustlers do or do not exercise agency. Consequently, male street prostitutes are either young (vulnerable/powerless/naive), drug dependent (emotionally enslaved), sexually abused (emotionally unstable and incapable), economically desperate (powerless), and white, middle-class and perhaps even straight (innocent/worthy of rescue), or they are of age (powerful) and in search of sexual excitement and community (gay and empowered). A third narrative, more noticeable in the past than today, alternatively portrays male street prostitutes as being of age (powerful), Black, Latino, and/or working class (dangerous), and law-breaking (dangerous). The struggles which underlie and shape these portrayals often go unnoticed, yet they exert a determining role in the fight to depict "the hearts and minds" of male prostitutes to various outsiders.

With male gang members and other violent street criminals, for example, journalistic depictions commonly create support for the idea that the individuals involved are in complete and total control of their behavior, thereby justifying any sort of punishment which might follow. The predominant discourse which surrounds male prostitution today, on the other hand, creates an image which actively disavows the

presence of agency. While the assertion of masculine agency facilitates punitive incarceration, the denial of agency in the case of young male prostitutes accomplishes a different series of tasks: it (1) denies the relevance of the participants' experience of a given practice, (2) encourages the adoption of external evaluations of these practices, and (3) justifies control over the lives of participants, ranging from return to one's family to allegedly *protective* types of custody in extremely rule-bound shelter and treatment facilities. Thus, whereas virtually none of the "non-masculine" or subordinating experiences of gang members are explored, *only* these elements are examined in the case of male street prostitutes.

This narrative approach runs the risk of reinforcing conservative notions of familial benevolence and over-simplifying ideas which equate street life with danger. While the "normal" family is portrayed as a good place for children, the streets are seen in a uniformly negative light, a perspective that fundamentally fails to address why many youth would choose to leave their homes, or what it means that a parent has the power to leave a child without shelter by pushing them out. The model tends to presume that good solutions are those which "restore" a normatively middle-class and family-based lifestyle. Unsurprisingly, Christian social service organizations tend to more fully incorporate this approach (see, for example, McGeady, 1994, 1996; Ritter, 1988), but academic portrayals often hold "the family" over and against "the street" as well (for further critique, see Brock, 1998).

While familial restoration or placement in a highly controlled treatment facility may serve the needs of some participants, the exclusionary focus on sexual victimization leaves many agencies unable to offer relevant assistance to participants who do not see

themselves in such terms. Politically, then, such representations work to limit the type of help which is available to those on the street, particularly services which are premised upon the potential for ongoing prostitution and participation in street life (precisely the premise of "harm reduction"). Services based upon a model of rescue also tend to result in what is informally known within the service community as "skimming," in other words, the removal of the easiest-to-serve (read: middle-class and obedient) individuals from the street, while leaving disobedient, drug-using, and otherwise "trouble-causing" individuals without significant aid. Bringing forth new representations of male street prostitution may therefore promote alternative services which are relevant to those falling outside the current, more dominant approach.

In what follows, I will present six different male street workers who, in various ways, do not fit the dominant narrative of the straightforwardly "exploited youth" (nor other narratives which have been forwarded). Following this, I will explore three themes that have been under-examined by the majority of social scientific literature on male prostitution: space and the material underpinning of street life; street relations and emotional instrumentality; and violence and the self-management of identity. My intention is to reveal some of the tremendous diversity which exists among male street workers, and then to situate their lives within common social conditions which are often ignored.

This material is based upon nearly nine months of ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in a West coast city from mid-1999 to mid-2001. Most of this time was spent working with a small harm-reduction agency that served male street prostitutes and emphasized a harm reduction approach (this involved street outreach, running a needle

exchange, preparing and serving food, distributing clothes, etc.). Through this work, I had some manner of contact with approximately 80-100 individuals who worked on the street. Two additional weeks were spent living in an tentement hotel near the primary hustling scene. Due to constraints placed upon my research (which I write about in some detail in my thesis [2001]), I was able to conduct only a limited number of in-depth in terviews, including five with current street workers, three with others who had formerly worked as hustlers on the streets, three with "sugar-daddies," and four with social workers who were directly involved with the youth. Additional information comes from numerous informal conversations I had with the director of the harm-reduction agency. I additionally make liberal use of three academic works that examine the non-sexual aspects of male street workers' lives, This Idle Trade by Visano (1987), The Times Square Hustler by McNamara (1994), and Mean Streets by Hagan and McCarthy (1997). After presenting this work, I will return briefly to the question of the political foundations which lie beneath representations of male street prostitution, and suggest alternative directions which I feel might be fruitfully engaged by future researchers.

Six Lives, Six Experiences

> Aaron has a B.A. in journalism, and works in an office as a supervisor. Thirty-seven years old, he has been working as a prostitute for the past three years. Aaron generally works by placing an escort ad in the local gay newspaper, but sometimes he works out of the bars on Polk Street, and occasionally works directly on the street. He earns $100 per hour when working as an off-street escort, much more than the $20 charged for the quick hand-jobs and blow-jobs

that are common with street work. Though he is hired by the hour, clients sometimes finish after 15 to 20 minutes, giving him an hourly wage that far exceeds the $14 per hour he makes as an office supervisor, a wage that he has come to resent since beginning sex work. He enjoys doing sex work ("I got off on them getting off on me. I was somebody's fantasy"), and compares it positively to higher status personal services, such as therapy. He dislikes the term "hustler" because "it implies dishonesty" and "there's no hustle in what I'm doing. You call me, you know what you're going to pay." Aaron wishes he could work as a prostitute full-time as it would give him more time to pursue his artistic interests, but he typically entertains only four clients a month, making the transition impossible. (During his best month, he earned $1500, but this was an anomaly.) Though clients do sometimes arrange dates well in advance, Aaron generally works by returning any daily messages and seeing a client that same evening.

Despite the fact that he earns more money with clients contacted through his ad, Aaron occasionally enjoys working on the street. "I've always wanted to be a rebel. I like to be a little scandalous and shocking....I think a lot of guys would every now and then like to put on our trashiest clothes and stand out on the stroll. I don't know if a woman would ever say this, but for a gay man being a whore isn't such a big switch. It's like doing what you've always been doing and getting paid for it." However, Aaron does not fit in well with the rest of the street scene. "I'm wearing a three hundred dollar leather jacket and carrying a credit card in my pocket. Street guys look at me like 'What the fuck are you doing here?' They almost thought I was a date." Aaron finds the street prices

"ridiculous" and often works in the bars instead, though both of these venues remain secondary to his work through the newspaper. Aaron says he would work on the street and in the bars more frequently, but he fears arrest, particularly on the street. Though he has never heard of anyone being arrested in a bar (among male prostitutes, only street workers have been arrested), he feels that the police are more likely to arrest people working there than those who work through advertisements.

I ran into Aaron on the streets several months after our initial discussions. He had quit his job and was about to move to Los Angeles. He needed to earn some extra cash in order to make the move, though, and he was working in the bars and on the streets to get the money. He was unhappy about being so low on cash, and was clearly somewhat concerned about being able to obtain enough for the move. Still, he offered no criticisms of prostitution, and instead complained about the judgmental attitudes of some other gay men: "They put me down for having sex with guys who they think look gross. But there's always something you can find that is attractive about someone. Those guys that put me down are just smug and arrogant."

Stephen began working in a male Asian massage parlor in New York City immediately after leaving home at age 18. Now 31, he describes his childhood as "difficult, but not terribly abusive." His gay identity became a major point of contention with his parents during his teen years, and he left home ready for the freedom to explore gay sex. He found a new "family" (his term) organized around

gay sex work, a group of approximately 20 boys and men, mostly white and aged 16 to 25, who lived together, did drugs together, and hung out with each other on the street while working and playing (the distinction between these two activities being not entirely absolute). Trusting no one over 21 unless they were in the group, Stephen found community, support, affection, and affirmation of his gayness among his friends, things he craved. Stephen did not himself work on the street as he was able to earn more in the massage parlor ($35-40 per trick), but even the off-street work was difficult, and he says he sometimes felt like he was working "in a sweatshop."

Unlike Aaron, Stephen did not maintain a strictly "professional" attitude toward his work. Desperate for affection and gay affirmation, he looked to his clients for these things, even following a few that he liked to their homes. At the other end of the spectrum, he sometimes rifled through the wallets of his clients, a fact that caused him to be beaten up a few times. He continued to steal, however, and learned to enlist the support of the house management by talking back to angry victims ("This guy's trying to pull something!"). Stephen says that he experienced "a lot" of scary situations, nearly getting raped once, but that his attitude (and the attitude of his friends) was overwhelmingly dismissive: "I was more worried about not being able to work with all the cuts and bruises on my face than anything else. We almost expected to get raped. It was no big deal." The group would offer support to each other in such situations, "not by processing and stuff, but just by being there. We'd take them to the hospital where they treated us like shit because we didn't have any money." Stephen notes that the police began

to arrest everyone on the street at a certain point, forcing everyone into the bars. “Only those folks who couldn’t get in kept the stronghold out on the street, but most found a way in despite the difficulty” (either sneaking in or via fake IDs).

Stephen says his entire life revolved around prostitution during these years. He did, however, manage to put himself through college, though the experience was “entirely alien” for him, divorced as it was from the rest of his life. His upper middle-class parents gave him money for school, which enabled him to use his earned money only for recreational commodities, particularly drugs. He readily shared his money with his street family, most of whom had significantly less access to cash. The overall lack of income in the network forced the group to live in “a lousy neighborhood” and in extremely crowded conditions (six people each lived in four different flats, “but people would bring friends if they needed to crash, so there were usually more like 10 to 15 people at a time”). Stephen emphasizes that he was not economically forced to do sex work, and that despite the difficulties he encountered there, he found the affection and affirmation of gay identity that he craved.

At present, Stephen continues to do sex work, though now he does elite level outcall, advertising solely through word of mouth. He earns $350 per hour, and uses the money to support his graduate studies at an upper-tier university. He says that he takes a very different attitude toward his work today, keeping it distinct and largely separate from his personal life. He stays in touch with many of his former friends, but infrequent phone calls have replaced the intense bonds that once existed.

Jeremy, a somewhat run-down looking 33-year-old, speaks at a mile a minute, and seems to be on speed most of the time. He has a difficult time tracking a single topic, and our conversation wanders in and out of coherence. He's very pleasant, but is clearly prone to excitability and anger when talking about any emotional topic. During these flashes, he often stands up quickly and paces for a few seconds before sitting back down. He does not seem directly threatening, but woven within his rambling tales are stories of domestic abuse with prior boyfriends. Jeremy cannot understand why one of his young lovers cried and cried after he hit him several times. He falls deeply in love with boyfriends and does not understand why things never work out, or why some people take "an attitude" toward him. Nor can he understand why some people victimize each other on the street, though he is together enough to avoid those who do (except for those he loves). He seems to feel deeply victimized by the world and, indeed, it sounds like he is on the receiving end of as much abuse as he dishes out. At times he nearly cries when relating his story, particularly in relation to boyfriends who have left him, but his emotions change quickly and flash by before any real depth occurs.

Jeremy gets a little bit of money from his family, but he generally has little contact with them because they wish to place him in a mental institution. The money he receives pays for his basic expenses, but nothing else, so he also works as a prostitute. Given his age and appearance, he is less able to attract clients; however, he finds enough men who are willing to pay to survive financially, even

with (or perhaps because of?) his erratic interpersonal mannerisms. He works most frequently in bars, but he also works on the streets. Occasionally, he attempts to work in cruising zones that are not understood to be for prostitution, and expresses frustration at the "negative attitude" he receives when he asks people for money. Jeremy is not completely out of touch with reality — he is not subject to hallucinations, and generally knows what is going on around him — but an empathic ability to understand what others might think or feel seems entirely beyond him.

When I see Jeremy at a health clinic several months after our initial interview, he is accepting help from a conservative Christian group of some sort, and is accompanied by a woman in her early twenties. Several of his friends have expressed displeasure about his association with the group, but he doesn't care who helps him, as long as he gets some help. He says that he has been off speed for three days and is still waiting to come down. He decided to quit because the paranoia was becoming too intense: he recalls standing on a street corner for a very long time, afraid to leave the spot. I suggest he stay away from Polk Street if he wants to stay off of drugs. He agrees: "There'd always be people trying to drag me back into it." Jeremy still jumps from topic to topic during our conversation, but he seems somewhat calmer and more coherent than before.

Kevin is a 16-year-old runaway who works on Polk Street in San Francisco. He left home at age 14 in order to escape the physical abuse of his father, traveling to a different city in order to avoid his family. He speaks with anger about the way

that the social service agencies only allow him to stay for three days before reporting his whereabouts to his family. He knows exactly what he can get from each agency and what their rules are regarding parental notification, information that is shared amongst his peers on the street. He uses speed regularly, and his face is covered with sores that have resulted from his compulsive, speed-induced sessions of picking at his skin. He used to be homeless, a situation that left him exposed to theft and violence from other homeless youth. More generally, however, the other youth acted as sources of friendship and information regarding where to sleep, where to get food, and other knowledge pertinent to survival on the street. One of the reasons Kevin chooses speed over other drugs (the selection of *some* drug seems predetermined) is because "We have all these great conversations about life and philosophy and stuff. When you're on heroin, all you do is sleep and wake up and then you need to get money. That's your whole life. I don't have to pay to sleep!" Like most other youth, Kevin tends to hang out with others who do the same drug, mostly due to the differing effects of the substances, but also because the dealers on the street connect with different networks.

At first, running away and getting high on the street offered Kevin a sense of adventurous fun. Drawn further into street life, however, he turned to prostitution after he had left home for a longer period and became desperate for money. Kevin was deeply affected by his experience doing sex work: "I don't see how anyone with a brain can be bought and sold like a piece of meat and still think of themselves as a whole person," he offered. "It took me a long time to get over that, though I'm not through it yet. It will be there forever." Still, while he

used to be certain he was straight, Kevin is no longer so positive: "I didn't put myself in a crutch to maintain my sexuality as much as I would like....Every time I saw some guy I felt like I was letting myself down, like I was telling myself I wasn't heterosexual any more...'cuz I started to like it sometimes."

Kevin now spends time hanging out with his friends, especially a 31 year old named Paul who Kevin calls his sugar-daddy. "He helps me turn tricks," comments Kevin offhandedly. Though it was not entirely clear to me if Kevin and Paul have ever had sex, I find out later that Paul has a reputation of getting young kids like Kevin high and then having sex with them without a condom, despite the fact that he is HIV positive. Whatever the case, Kevin clearly likes Paul. "He is not a forceful person. He used to give me stuff all the time, almost like an infatuation I've had with girls before....I would miss hanging out with him if I ever left." Whatever adversity Kevin faces, however, he wants to make it clear that he is *not* the victim service agencies make him out to be. "I've lived my life out here, and I've lived a lot more than most people. I've had a lot of good times too."

Timothy is hard to hear over the blaring house music he has playing in his room. It's 2 am, and he is in a heavy sweat from working out and practicing his martial arts. Timothy is living in the same tenement hotel as I am, but his room, unlike most of the others, is very clean and well-ordered. His bed is much nicer than the others too — it is clearly not from the hotel — and his stereo seems expensive. And powerful. Knowing how paper thin the walls are, I wonder how his neighbors can tolerate the noise, but no one seems to be coming by to complain.

When I tell Timothy about my project and ask if he might be interested in doing an interview sometime, he immediately informs me that he can't: "No way man. I'm planning to write a book about hustling myself," he says, "so I don't want to give you all my secrets. I will tell you this, though. Psychologists don't know shit about hustling. They're reading about it in books. That's like trying to learn about swimming by reading." Having said that he won't disclose anything, Tim nevertheless proves quite talkative. He tells me he is 20 years old. He was originally from New York City, but he left there three years ago because he's fleeing probation. "You have to know how to work the police. Like if they stop me and say 'Where are you staying?' I tell them, 'At the Holiday Inn, motherfucker. D'ya want to see my key?' See, they aren't used to being talked back to, so that takes them off guard." I seriously doubt Timothy's version of events, but the whole point seems to be to make himself appear tough and street-savvy. "See, that's a hustler," he continues, "a hustler works the street. There's a difference between hustlers and prostitutes. A hustler will, like, play a straight guy. It's like, some guy comes up and wants to do something, you have to be 'Oh, I don't know. I'm straight. I don't do that.' 'Well, how about for some extra money?' See, a hustler works the street. A prostitute will be on his belly getting fucked in all of three months, all strung out on crack." Timothy jumps around from topic to topic, but the common thread underlying each story seems to be self-promotion. "See this guy," he says, quickly flashing me a name in a computerized address book, "This guy is into some serious shit. Mafia stuff. I saw this guy in Chicago. Me and him are real tight. I could have someone killed if I

needed to."

Timothy says he's been working the streets for "a long time" now. His current plan is to obtain a fake ID (cost: $300) and obtain a job at a local gay strip club in which the workers also regularly turn tricks. "I'm young, and I want to do all this before I get to be some old, crusty shit." Despite his forceful presentation of self, Timothy alludes to difficulties entailed by his choice of life: "It's great to ride fast, but still, when you crash you wish you were going 55."

Ernest, age 41, is one of the oldest street hustlers I have met. Ernest has been working the streets for years, and though it is clearly no longer his primary source of income, Ernest insists that he can still obtain tricks. The point is clearly a source of pride for him, and it seems apparent that his identity as a street hustler is tied in with his sense of attractiveness and self-esteem. With his body looking somewhat ragged, however, both from a life on the street and regular speed use, I am unsure how much work he is actually able to obtain.

Not surprisingly, Ernest is a somewhat marginal figure within the network of street workers. Though he knows most of the people in the scene, it appears he never spends much time with them beyond passing conversations on the street. Ernest seems somewhat bitter about his isolation from the social scene, telling me flatly that "You have to buy your friends out here, either with money or drugs. That's pretty much what people want." Ernest's one stable contact is his lover, a partner of several years with whom he lives in a nearby hotel. His lover is currently on disability, and the state pays Ernest a small sum to act as his

caretaker. The amount is not enough to live on, however, so he supplements the sum by writing fraudulent checks. (I was never sure if these were stolen or forged.) He writes the checks, buys an item of significant value, and then returns it for cash before the store has an opportunity to find out that the check did not clear. Taking care of his lover and check fraud are Ernest's primary sources of income these days, but he remains committed to occasional prostitution, identifying himself more in relation to his work on the street than anything else.

In his voluminous and detailed work concerning male prostitution, West (1993) describes three different depictions of male street prostitutes within the contemporary literature: homosexual, desperate, and dangerous. In the first, young men are said to move into prostitution by choice, as a means of exploring their own sexual identity as developing gay men. In the second, correctly identified by West as dominant within the academic (and social service) literature, male prostitutes are described as runaway youth who turn to prostitution as a means of last resort. Finally, male street prostitutes are sometimes envisioned as "amoral delinquents" who threaten and rob their clients. While West suggests that these three types actually exist on the street, I contend that the various portrayals have as much to do with the political agenda of the authors as they do with actual street life. Each of these three portrayals highlights certain facts while underplaying others, implicitly identifying its own problems and suggesting its own solutions in the process (challenging heterosexism, providing services, and incarceration, respectively). While I would not argue that the empirical reality of male prostitution is entirely irrelevant in the construction of its representation, careful attention must be paid to the interactive relationship between this reality and the context of authorship.

Even individuals who fit fairly well into the standard narratives exhibit divergent traits. Stephen, for example, closely approximates the image of the gay-identified youth who has chosen prostitution as a means of forging gay community and gaining sexual experience with men, yet the various difficulties he encountered with clients (ranging from unrequited desires for relationship to confrontations over theft) are notably absent from most portrayals of the gay prostitute. Kevin likewise exemplifies the image of the desperate runaway in many ways, yet his emphatic rejection of a victim identity poses a difficulty for service agency narratives, as does his insistence on the mutuality of the relationship with his sugar-daddy/pimp. And while Timothy presents himself in a way according with the "dangerous delinquent," his open homosexuality would seem to give him a problematic relationship to the role of aggressive street tough. Seeing Timothy during one of his self-described "crashes" might also render him a more vulnerable and less threatening figure.

If the three representational strategies identified by West ignore certain elements of the lives of those who come close to fitting into designated categories, they render invisible those whose lives are less politically useful. Jeremy, for example, is not only older than most workers, but more mentally unstable. Through prostitution he finds a way to live outside of the psychiatric institutions his parents placed him in, as well as the means to participate in a lifestyle of casual sex and drug use which he generally finds enjoyable (though his opinion shifted over time). Aaron, for his part, enjoys the "slumming" aspect of his work on the street, and if the police were less of a factor, he might do it more frequently. Meanwhile, Ernest's desire to embody the sexually desirable image of the "prostitute" extends somewhat beyond his social reach. While all three of

these “outliers” share certain traits — they are all gay-identified and find in prostitution something of a lifestyle or an identity that they enjoy — they also have important differences, both in the manner in which they fit into the larger milieu of street hustlers, and in terms of their experiences with clients.

While an emphasis upon the individuality of each street worker acts as a necessary corrective to the somewhat homogenized portrayals created in the past, the act of highlighting “diversity” carries its own dangers. Liberal gestures toward the uniqueness of each person are inadequate if they fail to simultaneously identify structural characteristics within the larger social scene, problems and dynamics with which each individual must contend. Liberal notions of “uniqueness” also fail to identify patterns in the ways varying groups of individuals tend to come to terms with these structures. In this following section, I examine three structural and relational aspects of street life which are seldom discussed in the literature on male prostitution. These issues are particularly important given their near invisibility within the hegemonic narrative of the “exploited teen.” In some ways it may seem that what follows begins to veer into a study of the social dynamics of male street life rather than a study of male street prostitution, but part of my point is precisely that the non-sexual aspects of male street prostitution have been ignored. In order to correct this imbalance, I contend, the literature on male prostitution must be augmented by the literaure on male street life, and vice versa.

Space and the Material Underpinning of Street Life

Kevin needed to find a place to shoot up. He was just starting to come down from a prior hit of speed, and he wanted to find a place quickly before he completely crashed.

He hated shooting up outside though, because the cops could come by and then he'd be busted, so he walked a block off of Polk Street to a gas station that he knew of on Van Ness. If he could get in, he figured it would be a good place because the bathrooms there had locked doors, and he could be alone. All he had to do was convince the attendant to let him in. That proved to be easy. Kevin looked pretty put-together, not homeless at all, and probably because of this the man working at the gas station gave him the key even though he wasn't a customer.

Kevin was still fairly new to shooting up, though, and the process took some time. He had been in there about three minutes when two other men drove up to fill up on gas and to use the bathroom. They waited for a while, but then began to grow impatient. K nocking at first, and then pounding on the door, the two became increasingly hostile in tone. "Hey! What are you doing in there? I really gotta piss!" Kevin, however, hadn't finished preparing the shot, and he didn't want to leave. Besides, he couldn't leave in the middle of everything, with all of his equipment in the open. The men outside grew increasingly impatient. "I think he's shooting up in there," said one of them, "Hey! Are you shooting up in there?" The two kept pounding on the door and proceeded to call over the attendant. "What you doing in there?" demanded the attendant, "You better get out now or I'm calling the cops!" Kevin finished up and started to put away his things. "All right man, I'm coming." The attendant kept banging loudly on the door. "I'm gonna call the cops right now." Kevin managed to get all of his things together, stuffing everything into his knapsack, opening the door to three sets of hostile eyes. "Stupid punk," said one of the men. "Get the hell out of here," added the attendant, but that's all that happened. Kevin walked away without getting beaten up, and no police, but he

obviously couldn't go back to that gas station, at least not when that same attendant was there...

For those who are living on the street without many resources, daily activity often revolves around attempting to find what one needs for survival: food, shelter, clothing, bathrooms, and, for many, drugs. The desperation of this search is reflected in the innovation individuals often display in finding spaces, and the rapidity with which opportunities are seized upon. Many shelters and food banks, for example, find themselves having to police the activities which occur in their bathrooms, lest someone begin engaging in a behavior whose illegality could threaten the standing of the agency. Similarly, public locales that have been abandoned by their owners have the potential to quickly be taken over and converted into unofficial "squats" for living or regular "shooting galleries" where homeless drug users can inject. As homeless people attempt to creatively appropriate a physical environment which was designed for consumers with housing, utilizing it to meet their basic needs, they often find themselves in conflict with shop-owners, police, and other stewards of the local territory.

The conflict over bathrooms, as in Kevin's story, acts as a case in point. Bathrooms serve multiple purposes for many on the street, offering one of the few private spaces that homeless people are able to find. A bathroom can become a site not only for relieving oneself, but for cleaning up, turning tricks, sleeping, reorganizing one's possessions (especially hidden items such as cash, weapons, or narcotics), and injecting drugs. Conflict over these spaces is pervasive in areas where homeless people congre gate. More than one of the restaurants and bars in the Polk Street area, where this study

was conducted, have installed buzzer systems which prevent all non-authorized access to their bathrooms, hoping, by such a measure, to take away any incentive homeless people might have to enter their premises. Most of the local merchants have opposed the installation of a public toilet in the area, arguing that the facilities will predominantly be used to shoot up and to turn tricks, and that it will draw still more homeless people to the area. Not surprisingly, many homeless people urinate in the alleyways, and the sight of human feces on the street is fairly common.

In the course of his work with street hustlers, the head of the agency I worked for, Terry, found that the workers would sometimes use the bathroom in order to inject drugs. Terry developed a practice of telling all of the youth using his services that the toilet was broken and keeping the door locked. Volunteers and board members were allowed to use the bathroom when no clients were present, but they were advised not to tell any of the clients of the subterfuge. Although Terry followed a policy of harm reduction, and was not ideologically opposed to the provision of spaces for "safer shooting," he was concerned that the illegal nature of the practice would be discovered by the police, thereby threatening the closure of his agency. Terry was also concerned about the possibility of an overdose, a scenario which, though less likely with him present, could be used to shut down the program. Terry choose to lie about the actual status of the bathroom because it was apparent that the clients would beg and plead if they knew of its functionality, feeling hurt in the end if Terry denied access. He made a few exceptions to the rule based on the trust he had established with one or two individuals, but in general he did not let even non-drug using clients use the bathroom because experience had shown him that such news would travel quickly. None of the volunteers, including

myself, offered any criticism of Terry's policy, instead actively collaborating with the maneuver by not asking for the keys unless none of the clients were around.

The lack of basic amenities clearly does not affect all male street workers equally. At the time of Kevin's difficulty at the gas station, he only prostituted sporadically, finding it too distasteful to engage in on a more regular basis. Like many other runaway youth, Kevin confronted a seemingly endless series of desperate situations as he struggled to survive. However, while most of the young men who prostitute do so only when desperate (Hagan and McCarthy, 1998; West, 1993), Kevin's experience does notr eflect the smaller number of individuals who involve themselves in the work on a more full-time basis. Indeed, for this smaller group, sex work can provide a means through which they are able to support themselves in much greater comfort than many of those around them. Timothy, for example, had never been homeless in his entire street career, at least according to his version of events. "This is the lowest I've been," he said during our discussion, gesturing to the very unblemished hotel room surrounding him, "and this ain't so bad." Indeed, for those who are able to successfully prostitute on a full-time basis, the work can provide a relatively stable source of income. Stephen's earnings from the massage parlor, which he pooled with his friends who worked on the streets, enabled him to live in an ongoing basis in a shared apartment. While the amount of money varied, and might seem low in relation to middle-class standards, it is nonetheless a great deal more than is available through most other options on the street. Even by seeing only one to three clients a day, most sex workers are able to lead lives which are considerably easier than those who do not engage in prostitution. As an adolescent male street prostitute in Hagan and McCarthy's (1998) study explained:

> I'm a young urban professional....like I go out, I make some money....I mean I don't sit there and panhandle and get all of maybe twenty bucks a day. I get all of twenty bucks a half-hour....So, uhm, I'm a "yuppie" street person in a sense....I can afford to live, and they're literally surviving. We are all really just surviving, because none of us know how to live. All we know how to do is survive, except we [those of us in the sex trade] survive a bit easier (ellipses in original; p. 89).

Like Timothy and Stephen, this youth's experience on the street is made radically different from Kevin's early ordeals simply by virtue of his access to cash.

Furthermore, street youth who engage in prostitution sometimes obtain access to other resources which are unavailable to non-prostitute youth. Young men often receive invitations from older men — often known as "sugar-daddies" — who seek longer-term relationships (West, 1993). Many young men on the street actively desire such relationships as they offer substantial material benefits over street prostitution. As Weisberg (1985) comments, "It maximizes personal safety and financial security, and it lessens the psychological and physical demands of numerous anonymous sex partners" (p. 161). While some workers view such relationships as a threat to their independence, in general, having a sugar-daddy is seen as a prestigious accomplishment: "It is proof of one's lovability, approval, acceptance, desirability, and smart operating" (Caukins&Coumbs, 1976; as cited in Weisberg, 1985, p. 161). Frequently, those with sugar-daddies will continue to supplement their income through ongoing street prostitution; however, some who form more stable relationships with their benefactors

use the association as a means to leave street life altogether.

For a variety of reasons, not every individual on the streets has equal ability to engage in prostitution, either on the streets or with sugar-daddies. As noted above, the majority of young men on the street, like Kevin, find the idea of having sex with another man personally degrading, resorting to it only during times of extreme need. Others who are more favorably inclined toward prostituting can nevertheless face other types of barriers. Ernest's participation, for example, was severely limited by his age and relatively low "bodily capital," facts which required him to rely primarily upon other activities in order to support himself. Similarly, Jeremy's age and mental difficulties restricted his access to clients. Like Ernest, Jeremy depended upon an outside source of income, spending his monthly SSI check (for his mental disability) on his basic necessities and using his prostitution earnings in order to purchase drugs and other incidentals.

There are also race and class differences which shape one's ability to prostitute, particularly for those who seek sugar-daddies (who are overwhelmingly white and middle-class themselves). One sugar-daddy I spoke with while sitting in a café on Polk Street pointed to a noticeably well-groomed young man with middle-class "Gap"-style clothing who was standing outside and appeared to be hustling. "That kid is new," he said. "He's been well-taken care of. He'll be picked up by someone real quick. He's cute, not like some of the other guys out here....Most of the guys [who act as sugar-daddies] are looking for someone they can take care of, someone who can be their son." Another sugar-daddy I spoke with wanted to find "someone who won't bring too much drama into my life," and reported terminating relationships with youth who stole from him. Terry

similarly noted that many of the older men "pick a kid up and take them home for as long as they can stand them," kicking out the youth when the "chaos factor" becomes too great. This preference for stability enables those youth who are most accustomed to middle-class ways of being, and whose habitus is least affected by street life and drugs, to find older men who will sponsor them, while leaving behind others who are more reliant upon the street.

The conditions under which an individual engages in prostitution play a significant role in shaping his experience of sex work. While those who are relatively well off are able to pick and choose their clientele, youth who are materially desperate find themselves pressed to accept any opportunity which comes their way. This exacerbates the risk taken by these youth, making them significantly more likely to be arrested, to find themselves with a dangerous client, to accept extra cash for unsafe sex, or simply to have sex with someone they find exceptionally unappealing. As Kevin pointed out to me: "You do unsafe things when you're desperate." The task of formulating these situational differences, or "class" differences, within street life has not been sufficiently explicated in prior work, which tends to treat "street youth" as a somewhat homogeneous category.

Street Families and Emotional Instrumentality

With few economic options available, those without other work are frequently pressed to scrutinize one another for their survival needs. Even among those who are living like "street yuppies," the need to obtain resources on a daily and sometimes immediate basis leads many to take an instrumental approach toward other people which

frequently sanctions taking advantage of others. The “hustler” prototypically embodies this relational orientation, seeking to “work the streets” by manipulating others and turnin g every possible situation to one’s benefit. Those who fail to operate this way run the risk of becoming victims, of becoming mere “prostitutes,” as Timothy put it.

For those who are new to the street environment, the instrumentality of social life on the street can come as quite a shock. Unfamiliar with the rules of the street, and unconnected with the street networks which might offer protection, newcomers can beco me relatively easy targets for muggers and con men (Bresnahan, 1995). “You can barely trust anyone out here,” Kevin told me. “Most of the people on the street are just out for themselves. They’ll stab you in the back. Ninety percent of them are like that. I found that out the hard way” (for similar comments, see Visano, 1987, pp. 140-1). Older, more experienced workers sometimes view those who are entering the street scene for the first time as potential resources. Seeing their vulnerability, some hustlers quickly move to offer assistance in orienting the newcomers to the scene. For experienced hustlers, these relationships provide access to a subordinate who can perform undesirable tasks: running errands, creating distractions while others shoplift, acting as lookouts, and carrying drugs or weapons (Visano, 1987). In referring to his own status as a “newcomer,” Visano describes the power imbalances that operate within these exchanges:

> They expected immediate deference in exchange for cooperation. The would brook no challenge to their instructions. I was advised “to keep my mouth shut and just listen” even when they hurled insults at me. It was especially difficult listening to seasoned straight hustlers take great delight

> in elaborating sordid details about the violence they inflict on clients and various recalcitrant newcomers. Their casual threats of violence reinforce subordination on the part of all outsiders (p. 53).

Other hustlers approach newcomers with more kind-hearted intentions and approaches. As one experienced hustler remarked: "We is all in the same shit. You see yourself in these fish. They're scared....I'm human too. I'm tough too, but a pussy cat when I see a really young boy looking around. No place to go. They's just cruisin' for a bruisin'" (ibid, p. 135-136). Nevertheless, in almost all cases of tutelage, it is expected that the newcomer will form a relationship that materially benefits the more experienced partner, not only through the performance of subordinate tasks, but by paying a cut of their earnings as they learn how to prostitute (Hagan&McCarthy, 1998). These relationships are not entirely one-sided, however. Newcomers gain food and shelter during their critical orientation phase, and also learn the skills which they require in order to become independent (Visano, 1987). After a few weeks of apprenticeship, newcomers typically seek to redefine their relationships and place themselves onto equal footing with their teachers (ibid).

The early phases of a relationship can also become a time of testing as one individual attempts to see if they can manipulate the other to their benefit. In my own work dispensing syringes through a needle exchange program run through Terry's agency, I was repeatedly asked by the young men who visited if I could give them additional syringes, despite the fact that they knew Terry's policy specifying that needles must be traded on a one-for-one basis. Terry likewise advised me not to dispense any

cash as “It would change your relationship with the kids forever. You’d be just another resource and nothing else.” Terry also warned me to be on guard against any attempt to obtain anything from either me or the agency illicitly. With few exceptions, individuals entering the agency for help were to be supervised at all times in order to make sure that they did not steal. Although the majority of the young men did not attempt to steal anything, the possibility was sufficiently present as to have a globalized impact upon everyone on the street, both in terms of increased policing activity from outsiders and in terms of a heightened guardedness among the workers themselves (for similar comments, see McNamara, 1994).

Within this framework, the immediacy of the quest for resources gives those with better access to them increased social power. Ernest’s comment that “You have to buy your friends out here, either with money or drugs” speaks to this situation. One of the o ther street-based workers, Michael (briefly referenced in the opening vignette), also spoke cynically of friendship on the streets: “You don’t buy your friends out here, you rent them.” The need to form instrumental relationships places individuals together who would not associate with one another but for material need. Kevin, for example, described one of the people he used to hang out with regularly, Tom, as “this dorky kid,” adding that “he’s a retard.” Nevertheless Kevin spent a great deal of time with Tom because Tom still lived at home, using the street only as a short-term recreation activity (such youth are sometimes called “weekend warriors”; Sims, 1999, p. 29). Kevin did not really like Tom, but he appreciated Tom’s access to material items, including the fact that he possessed a car.

As Visano (1987) notes, “fast cash” thus takes on great significance within street

life. “Aside from the immediate benefits...such as partying, drugs, and a lavish consumerism, money also serves to determine friendship patterns, status and respect” (p. 140). This process works in reverse as well, potentially leaving those without access to cash socially isolated. For example, the 41-year-old Ernest noted that one of his friends had once received a full year’s worth of disability checks which had been wrongly withheld. “He had a lot of friends for a while, but he spent that $7000 in one month. Those guys are gone now, and hardly any of them are going to pay him back.” The social rationality of economically irrational behaviors — spending $7000 in one month, for example — was explicated by William Whyte in his 1943 study of an Italian ghetto community: $7000, while a great deal of money, is not a sufficient amount to alter one’s life circumstances, and hence it makes sense to obtain some social benefit from it by spending it quickly on those who with whom one wants to party. This also creates the conditions for reciprocal involvements when others come into cash, even if the majority don’t entirely pay back whatever “loans” they may have received. In the case of Ernest’s friend, however, the process may have backfired if those taking advantage of his bounty decided it was likely to be a one-time occurence, and therefore failed to reciprocate.

For some, the tendency toward relational instrumentality completely disrupts all possibility for strong social ties. As one young man remarked, “I don’t have friends. I have associates. People who I socialize with. You know, because there’s people who say they want to be your friend and they turn around and stab you in the back” (Clatts et al., 1999). Among many adolescent prostitutes, however, the proclivity to view others primarily in terms of their immediate usefulness is mitigated by the formation of i ntensely close-knit social networks. Hagan and McCarthy (1998) found that 54% of

homeless youth form close social networks of several individuals which they refer to through familial terms (such as “brother”), and further suggest that many of the remaining youth form close networks which utilize a more general terminology of friendship. For many adolescents, street families play an essential role in making day-to-day survival on the street possible. As one homeless adolescent in Hagan and McCarthy’s study described it:

> The way poverty on the street works, twenty bucks can go a long way. Like you can feed four people on twenty bucks, or you can feed one. It’s just a kinda thing where you have to work together and pool your resources. Like if I find a big bag of buns in the dumpster, it’s better to distribute those and not just myself eat buns all week. Somebody else’ll find tomatoes, and then we have tomato sandwiches. The food doesn’t go bad, and you can just eat it really quick (p. 162).

In addition to permitting youth to pool their resources, street families can enable youth to focus on aspects of survival for which they are best suited: “You each have certain expectations of each person, as to what their reactions are going to be in certain situations and what their roles are. Like as in protecting each other or finding the squat to stay in” (idem).

Beyond meeting material needs, street families serve important psychological functions, providing companionship and support. Stephen, for example, spoke of having “100% confidence” in his friends from the street, arguing that the intensity of street life

brought them close together:

> When you go through some of the things that we went through, it's like going through a war together or something. You start to feel intensely about everyone in the group. You'd just do anything for them....We would always be looking out for each other. Like if someone needed food or something, then we'd give it to him. Or one time I starting getting too involved with drugs, and they were there for me. They confronted me, but not in a mean way, but in a way that felt good, that showed me that they cared about me.

According to Kruks (1991), director of youth services at a gay and lesbian service center in Los Angeles, "Many of these youths feel so bonded to their street family that they may have little desire to leave street life" (p. 517).

While some youth manage to establish genuinely reciprocal relations with each other, others find themselves in dependent relationships of various sorts, particularly with sugar-daddies or, as seen above, with more experienced hustlers. Kevin complained ab out the first sugar-daddy he had, ultimately choosing the streets rather than live under the conditions that were gradually imposed:

> When I first moved in with him, I didn't even realize it was for the sex. It's like, just suddenly someone is being nice to you, and you don't know why. But if you get something, you give something, I learned that for sure.

> So then it was OK, but like, he wanted me to stop hanging out on the street and go back to school and stuff, and I was like, “See ya later.”

Yet, based upon my interviews with men who act as sugar-daddies, it seems that most relationships do not become all-encompassing. According to one middle-aged patron, one of the young men he sees shows up only about once every three or four weeks, relying upon him to provide a “landing pad” where he can recover whenever he bottoms out from extensive periods of drug use and whoring. Another patron, who himself lived in a tenement hotel, had relationships with a number of sex workers, typically seeing them br iefly (a day or two at most) whenever they dropped by his room.

Kevin’s involvement with his sugar-daddy provides an exceptional case, in that Paul, the older man, was not Kevin’s patron as much as his pimp, actively helping Kevin turn tricks and living off the proceeds. A second youth, a 17-year-old runaway named Nic, also reported that his 29-year-old lover, Ronald, helped him to work and shared the resulting money. These cases are notable in that the literature typically reports that pimping is not an activity which occurs with great frequency, or at all, among men (Allen, 1980; James, 1982; Weisberg, 1985; West, 1993). The dynamics involved in these two relationships, however, were quite different than what is described in the literature regarding men who pimp women. Both of these “pimps” (a term not utilized by the youths, nor, as far as I know, by the older men themselves) formed exclusive working relationships with the boys, and involved themselves closely in the work, helping Kevin and Nic find places to solicit and looking out for them with their clients. While Kevin described Paul both as his sugar-daddy and as his friend, Nic thought of Ronald as his

lover. Furthermore, both Paul and Ronald were active participants in the social network of hustlers; indeed, Ronald turned tricks on his own. While both Paul and Ronald were clearly older and more experienced than their younger partners, in some sense both of the older men were peers to the boys, a situation unlike the unbreachable status arrangements which prototypically characterize pimp-prostitute relations between women and men. Nevertheless, Paul and Nic did exercise some degree of control over the teens: Kevin looked to Paul for permission when I asked for an interview, and I only learned of Nic's relationship after a scene of domestic violence in which Ronald had hit Nic on the side of his head and left him bleeding. (Nic left the relationship as a result of this incident.)

The distinction between reciprocal and instrumental relations may not always be easily discernible, especially as the social fiction of reciprocity is often needed to maintain instrumental relationships. It is unlikely, for example, that the "dorky kid" that Kevin tolerated would have known of Kevin's genuine feelings toward him. Many hustlers similarly attempt to downplay the material basis of their interactions with clients in order not to insult them and to encourage repeat business. Older patrons may be described somewhat instrumentally as "sugar-daddies" or amatively as "lovers," but both terms may conceal mercenary impulses. Older patrons may act more or less instrumentally toward youths as well, discarding the young man after a time in favor of a newer, younger body (West, 1993), or forming a long-term relationship which helps enable the young man to come into a gay identity and obtain work off of the streets (Visano, 1987).

The discrepancy between street scenes which facilitate the formation of strongly-knit street families and others which foster a greater degree of instrumentality in

social relations has a great deal to do with the amount of desperation on the street. Within New York, for example, McNamara (1994) notes that those who are more desperate for money, particularly those who utilize crack regularly, are less able to form strong social bonds of reciprocal aid. While it was the older workers in my study who expressed the most cynicism regarding the possibilities for friendship on the streets — an opinion which perhaps related most to their marginality within the hustler networks — given their access to other sources of income, it seemed that they themselves are less instrumentally focused than those who lived under conditions of near-constant desperation. It is notable, however, that the demands of the environment led to the frequent dissolution of social ties, even among street families that are more amatively-based (Hagan&McCarthy, 1998; Visano, 1987).

Violence and the Self-Management of Identity

Given that male prostitutes tend to be young and have access to cash, it is not surprising that hustlers sometimes find themselves targeted by more physically-dominating individuals who seek to take their earnings by force (Weisberg, 1985; West, 1993). Indeed, assaults against street workers are more common than against other street youth, precisely because others recognize that prostitutes have access to cash (Hagan&McCarthy, 1998). The criminal status of prostitution also makes it less possible for hustlers to rely upon the police, as does runaway status, thus rendering street-based workers even more vulnerable (Weisberg, 1985). Prostitutes also have to deal with potential violence from their clients, including the possibility of rape (West, 1993).

For those who are isolated on the streets, the fear of being assaulted results in

considerable energy being expended to avoid vulnerable situations. Jeremy, for example, told me of how he had been accosted by four young men who demanded that he pay a "toll" each time he walked by. Jeremy addressed the situation by simply "laying low" and approaching the area only during the daytime, a solution he found much safer than risking a confrontation. Ernest dealt with danger by relying upon magical beliefs, once s howing me the amulet he kept "for protection," a tactic which may or may not actually help to ward off would-be attackers, but which at least instills a degree of confidence in the situation. Concern for one's safety can permeate a street worker's lived experience. As Ernest put it, "You have to watch your back out here. You never know who's going to be coming up on you. They watch you and watch you and wait until you're alone." Kevin also feared violence from others, telling me that he sometimes used speed as a way to stay awake, preferring not to make himself vulnerable by sleeping in the open at night, "so you're not just laying out there in your bag, waiting to get popped." Another young man in a study conducted by Michael Clatts and associates (1999) similarly reported that he would flee to the relative safety of prison rather than sleep on the streets: "Sometimes I would go and hop a [subway] and purposely get arrested, just so I can sit in jail and have a place to stay" (p. ?).

For youth within street cliques, the struggle to protect oneself becomes somewhat easier. Hagan and McCarthy (1998) note that a concern regarding safety is the most frequently mentioned reason why street youth join families, easily outranking the desire t o be socially connected to others or a desire to obtain food and other material goods. While Stephen tended to emphasize the emotional connection he had with the other members of his street family, it was clear that a strong protective element also existed:

> This one time we went up out of our hood, and there were these gang guys who were all hanging around. And we were sort of a gang, but we basically had no idea of what was going on. And the gang guys came up and they were sort of threatening us, because we were hanging out on their turf, and it all started looking very *unsafe* until Peter came in. He was black, and he was from that area, so he knew how to talk with those guys, and he was able to talk us out of it. Otherwise, we probably would have gotten our asses kicked. I mean we were tough, and most of the time we took care of our own, but these guys would have pummeled us.

Given the concern members of street families have for safety, it is not surprising that individuals who are more vulnerable tend to join more readily than those who feel more secure. Hagan and McCarthy (1998) report, for example, that female street youth are more likely to join street families than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, the longer a young male is without housing, the more likely he is to join a street family. Given that there are more young men on the street than women — constituting between 63% and 80% of the population of street youths — the overall number of adolescent males involved in street families exceeds the number of adolescent females. Being male and having comparatively stable access to housing, young hustlers who work full-time typically have features unlike the homeless youth who are most likely to join street families. A collective group nevertheless tends to form among full-time workers, serving both to protect members from outside threats and to establish community norms.

One of the most important demands made in exchange for community participation is that members back each other up in a fight, essentially without hesitation and no matter the cause (McNamara, 1994). Without this arrangement, community members would rapidly lose their ability to protect themselves. In addition to offering protection, the group establishes other community norms. Many of these rules are the same as those that are generally abided by on the street: sharing any drugs or money one has, paying back loans, and not giving information to the police (Visano, 1987). Beyond this, however, the core members of the hustler community enforce, or attempt to enforce, occupational norms upon other workers who are either new or simply less well integrated into the group. These rules mitigate against underpricing, specify that a worker is not to approach a potential client when another hustler is already talking with them, and prevent workers from beating up "good clients" and thereby scaring them away (Allen, 1980; McNamara, 1994; West, 1993).

The enforcement of community norms is not an automatic process. McNamara presents the angry reaction one street worker had upon finding out that an associate had not joined in to defend another community member:

> That stupid son of a bitch! What is this bullshit about him being on parole? That's fucking bullshit! If I see my boy is gettin' a beatdown, and that's my real boy, you think I'm on parole, I can't do nothin'? I'm gonna jump on the motherfucker even faster cause I know I'm going back upstate. He's talking about bein' on parole. I be like, "Yo man, what's up, I thought you were one of my boys, man?" That's when he be gettin' a

> serious assbeatin'. I should kick his ass now in front of everybody just to teach him a motherfuckin' lesson. I'm gonna get you man! You and me, man! (67).

More than taking isolated action, street-based workers will often attempt to mobilize others in order to render retaliatory punishment. The manner by which a worker will attempt to mobilize others has a great deal to do with the implicit power hierarchies which exist within the group. The following vingette shows how these dynamics can implicate even the service agencies involved in the area.

Don started throwing punches right in the dining area. The abruptness of the attack took Jeremy by surprise, even though he and Don had been getting into it verbally for about fifteen minutes. Don's pushy in-your-face attitude had angered Jeremy, the way it tended to aggravate everyone. Don was fine one-on-one, but he became aggressive when he couldn't be at the center of attention. Still, people didn't usually attack one another in the middle of the agency — they need to be able to go back, for one thing. Don had a reputation for being "crazy" though, so perhaps he wasn't really thinking. Whatever the case, Don's sudden ferocity had Jeremy on the ground, and his wild swings were making sure he stayed down. Terry, who single-handedly ran the hustler-focused service agency, was quick to intervene. Weighing twice as much as either of the fighting teens, Terry grabbed Don and forcefully pulled him back. The other three kids in the room moved in quickly as well, physically separating the two. Don angrily struggled to free himself from Terry's grasp. "CALM DOWN, DON!" commanded Terry, but he soon

lost his grip, and Don turned around and hit him. Don pulled the punch a little bit, uncertain at hitting this man who provided for him in so many ways, but the blow still landed with some force, squarely on the side of Terry's face.

A silence fell upon the room, just for a moment — clearly a line had been crossed. "Get out, Don!" commanded Terry. "I'm sorry, Terry," said Don. "Get out of here," Terry repeated, "Now!" Don took off, fast. Running down the stairs, he shouted back "Fuck you, Terry!" "We'll talk about this later!" offered Terry, but Don was already beyond his reach. Grabbing the door, Don slammed it shut as he left, shattering the glass, and, as it turned out, breaking the lock as well. The sound echoed upstairs into the dining area. Terry looked down the stairs for a moment at the broken glass, somewhat stunned, then he turned around and headed back into the dining area to aid and care for the other guys. He encouraged them to leave Don alone, but also announced that Don w as no longer welcome at the agency. "He's 86'd," he said simply, "at least for a while."

Don began to vent his rage by going on a mini-rampage through the neighborhood. The day after breaking the door, he saw Terry in a local cafe, went inside and started yelling obscenities before throwing hot coffee on Terry's shirt. Later he broke another window at a neighboring store, and was kicked out of at least one bar for causing problems. Terry decided to let the other street workers know who had broken the window, and about the coffee. They let Terry know they would give Don an "ear beating" and tell him to knock it off. Bringing group pressure to bear wasn't necessarily going to work, however, for the simple reason that it might not amount to much. "Don is no pushover. He knows a lot of people," said Michael, a 39-year-old prostitute-hustler. "Guys are a lot of talk. They'll say they'll beat someone up, but they won't do it."

Michael thought about intervening with Don himself, but decided against doing anything. "He's probably too crazy to understand anyway. Even if you beat him up, it wouldn't do anything." Having Terry's analysis of Don's "craziness" in mind, and noting that Michael obviously feared Don's "street heat," I figured that Michael was finding a convenient rationalization to do nothing, but I couldn't blame him either. I certainly had no desire to face Don, should he return.

Terry was in a bit of a jam. If he went to the police, he would lose the trust and respect of the guys on the street. The entire premise of Terry's work was that he was unlike the other service agencies — he would not police the guys or tell them to quit doing drugs or engaging in prostitution. If he called in the cops, he'd be seen as a "pussy" and as something of a traitor. He asked some of the guys to hang out in the office for a few days during dinner in case Don showed up. A few agreed, but with some grumbling. Privately, Michael told me that he didn't mind helping, "but I don't want to babysit."

Knowing that he could not get guys to watch his back indefinitely, Terry figured he had one trump card he could play. "If Don makes it impossible to work, I'll just shut down for a few days, and I'll let people know why." Without food or a place to get out of the rain, Terry figured that the guys would make it clear to Don that he had to back off. Thinking about the implications of this, I realized just how crucial Terry's agency was to the guys' survival. Yet without police protection, he was subject to the same logic of street violence as anyone else, a fact that tied Terry to the scene much more closely than most service agencies. The fact that so many people relied upon Terry gave him more power and leverage than most, but ultimately he had to make the same calculations of

force as everyone else on the street.

In the above situation, Terry first attempted to utilize his prestige within the community in order to protect himself. When this appeared as though it might not work, he was forced to consider employing his own positional leverage — vis-à-vis a temporary interruption of services — in order to convince others to respond to his need.

In a separate instance, Ernest threatened to spread a false rumor that another street worker was a snitch in order to take revenge for some stolen drugs. Ernest seemed to feel confident in this plan, saying "That prick has screwed over so many people that the shit is bound to come back on him. All I have to do is set it in motion." In yet another example, a sugar-daddy I spoke with commented that when one of the guys stole something from him, he would usually be able to get it back by spreading word on the street as to what had happened; his social standing within the group as a "good client" was such that the workers were often willing to apply pressure to the person who had taken the object to return it. These interactions highlight the implicit hierarchies within the group, revealing ways in which one's high standing can offer a degree of protection from harm, while being held in comparatively low regard can make one vulnerable to false accusations.

Given that workers are responding to a pervasive threat of violence, however, both from casual onlookers and from within the community itself, it is not surprising that street-based workers put a great deal of energy into managing their reputation within the community. The need to maintain one's street reputation has been extensively discussed in the context of inner city life by Elijah Anderson (1999). He describes the techniques which an individual must enact in order to maintain their street reputation: "A person's

public bearing must send the unmistakable, if sometimes subtle, message that one is capable of violence, and possibly mayhem, when the situation requires it, that one can take care of oneself" (p. 72). These patterns were clearly demonstrated within my own fieldwork. Not only did the question of Don's alleged "craziness" arise in the encounter with Terry, but others clearly worked to create the appearance of an intimidating presence. Beyond telling me about his mafia contacts, Timothy, for example, told me that he had sparred with martial arts film star Steven Segal, and showed me a rather nasty looking throwing knife. Threatening activities have an occupational benefit as well, for while workers take action to prevent paying tricks from being beaten up, being thought of as having the *potential* for violence encourages clients to pay and not attempt to take advantage of the hustlers (Visano, 1987). Fostering an image of potential violence also helps in attracting those clients who seek dangerous-looking "real men" (Kaye, 2003).

The need to create a powerful representation of self extends to the discussions that workers have with each other and the way in which they discuss life on the street. Street hustlers often portray their lives on the street as being full of adventure, exc itement, and fast action (Visano, 1987). Street life is depicted within these narratives as a place for "survivors" where individuals live by their wits and enjoy their freedom, particularly their independence from parental and school authorities (ibid). Hustlers' accounts do not necessarily ignore or underplay the difficult aspects of street life, but rather glorify the difficulties involved as foils against which they prove themselves. One street-based worker, for example, argues that:

> [E]ven when I froze my ass it was fun. It's a high out here. I guess, I'm

> like a fucking rebel. Christ, the more I last out here, the tougher I feel. That's pretty neat. All the action (Visano, 1987, p. 115).

Even tales of childhood abuse become grist against which an aggressive identity can be formed. Visano (1987) noted a tendency for hustlers to speak with him at great lengths about their abusive pasts, and queried a worker about it:

> What else have they got. They were hurt bad. Now they're smart. What it says is, "Listen Jack, I didn't take this from my old lady, so I ain't going to take it from anybody else." It makes them feel tougher. That's why. It gets them ready for anything. They'll dish it out to their tricks, even to other kids. Don't think they just talk about it to you, no way. They rap about it to their buddies, all the time (p. 109).

For similar reasons, hustlers often share stories about their exploits on the street, working to create a powerful image of themselves among their peers. McNamara (1994), for example, comments upon the way workers "try to upstage each other with tales of exploit and daring" (p. 68). Not surprisingly, stories are frequently embellished in ways designed to enhance the reputation of the teller, exaggerating the amount of cash received from a particular client, for example (Johnson, 1983; McNamara, 1995), or claiming to have been paid for sex by a famous person (Johnson, 1983). Newcomers who are attempting to establish their reputations are particularly prone to exaggeration, and to feel the vulnerability of their unsettled status (McNamara, 1994).

Notably absent from these stories are instances of being humiliated, or of being forced to do something in order to survive which makes them appear weak and vulnerable. Narratives which expose an individual as anything other than in control must, in fact, be countered at once. For example, after one adolescent sex worker teased another about seeing him sift through the garbage, the second youth very loudly proclaimed "I was *not* digging through the garbage!" This need to conceal vulnerability and maintain the appearance of power can affect one's daily strategies for survival. Another adolescent hustler told me that he refused to go to the shelter because, he emphatically said, "I am *not* homeless." Similarly, one of the street workers in McNamara's (1994) study refused to complete his community service for a prostitution charge because he did not wish to be seen cleaning the subways, a tactic which, while preserving his status, placed him at greater risk for future imprisonment. These decisions follow a similar logic that Bourgois (1996) noted in his observations of young men who eschew the legitimate labor market in favor of dealing crack, a job which at least affords them a degree of "respect" in relation to their peers.

Similarly absent from the workers' boastful narratives are accounts of the wide variety of innovative tactics street hustlers employ to defuse or otherwise circumvent conflict. In addition to the infrequent case in which a youth purposely gets themselves arrested in order to be placed in a jail cell, street-based workers employ other less dramatic strategies as well. Most obvious of these is the attempt to simply avoid others who might be dangerous, as Jeremy did when threatened by the group who demanded a "toll." Jeremy was able to employ this tactic, however, only because he did not live in the immediate vicinity and could thus avoid the general area where the men who were

menacing him typically gathered. Others who inhabit the area more constantly might attempt placating strategies. For example, I witnessed one youth make a direct appeal to another (much more menacing) hustler with whom he had a conflict: "I know we don't always get along, but I want you to know that I still pray for you." Whether self-interested or not, this comment served to allay the tension which had been rising between the two. When measures such as these are unworkable, some take the option of moving to another city. Many street kids, in fact, move along a circuit from city to city, staying in one area until either they become bored or "the heat," whether from police or from others in the scene, is too great. Still others decide that the violence on the street is too prevalent, and leave altogether. Jeremy, for example, decided to quit working when his fear of others — prompted by his run-ins with a neighborhood gang and heightened by excessive speed use — mushroomed into a paranoia which caused him to stand still on one corner for several hours, afraid to move. Even the effort to appear intimidating and ready for violence — the tactic those who are more powerful rely upon to ward off conflict — can be seen in this light as an paradoxical maneuver: while the approach involves the suppression of any public display of vulnerability, it exists as a tactic only in relation to an implicit recognition of possible victimization.

Conclusions

A number of insights arise from the above observations. Perhaps, most importantly, this work underscores the importance of poverty in shaping the social lives of most street-based male prostitutes, including their need to prostitute and their ability to negotiate the terms of paid sex. Although a great deal of diversity exists within the

population, most of the participants become involved in this work because of basic economic needs, though social factors (such as a given youth's desire to make contacts w ithin the gay community) also clearly shape the choice of prostitution over other options. While this observation regarding economic necessity is unsurprising, the way the exigencies of poverty both heighten the importance of peer relations, and shape the contours of these relations, is less discussed. This study also suggests that some older men are able to participate in limited ways within the social networks of street youth as "sugar-daddies," and that these men constitute an important (if problematic) locus of resources for some youth.

Another issue highlighted by this study involves the manner in which class and class-like elements shape the lives of street youth. Class privilege extends from one's ability to take advantage of youth services to one's ability to form successful relation ships with sugar-daddies, and potentially shapes one's ability to make casual clients as well. The ability to present a "tough" and aggressive image of self is a crucial survival skill that is also class-inflected. Middle-class norms of masculinity do not generally favor demeanors which are more mild, and thus the need to become accustomed to the deployment of threats and violence can work against one's ability to receive aid from social service agencies and sugar-daddies. As Bourgois (1996) documents in relation to street-level drug dealers, this process can mitigate greatly against one's ability to leave the street scene. Most generally, class is also a primary factor in shaping the social response male street prostitution receives from the state and other mainstream institutions, determining whether the acts will receive a punitive or ameliorative response from the broader society

A third critical area of inquiry concerns the role of social service institutions within street life. While some research has been conducted regarding the role of welfare within recipients' lives (e.g. Edin&Lein, 1997), very little has been written about the experiences of street youth with the NGOs which serve them (though see Bresnahan, 1995; Hecht, 1998; Snell, 1995). Among the youth I witnessed — youth who were not long-term clients — it was clear that service agencies constituted a much needed yet som etimes frustrating source of resources. Like Kevin, many of the youths expressed great anger at the way the agencies refused to offer more extensive services without controlling intimate aspects of their lives (fostering familial reuinifcation, demanding an end to drug use or sex work, rigidly enforced curfews, etc.). It was also clear that taking advantage of services through any necessary means — including the creation of sympathic "victim" selves — constituted yet another important strategy for daily survival.

This final comment once again calls attention to the enuncatory context in which statements are made, including our own.

[Sorry - paper not quite done!]

Need to mix the literatures. Comments on innocence - fails to recognize agency; sexualized fetish. Comments on macho - ultimately gets people arrested.

These dynamics make it important to access the contextual environment surrounding a given individual's presentation of "the life."

Yet differentiating the varied contours of people's experiences on the street is a basic issue which must be addressed if we are to better understand the issues which individuals confront

comparing gendered ideologies

looking at context of representation

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